

But Only the Left Ones

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Humor

Language: English

Characters: Snotlout

Status: Completed

Published: 2013-06-25 13:58:17

Updated: 2013-06-25 13:58:17

Packaged: 2016-04-26 15:24:45

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,367

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: In this one-off, I give Snotlout the spotlight (he doesn't get it very often), and also solve one of the most enduring mysteries ever known on Berk.

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A/N While poking around deviantart dot com in search of ideas for fanfics, I realized that there is a serious lack of stories where Snotlout does something right. I thought I'd try to remedy this oversight. At the same time, I thought I'd answer, once and for all, one of the most vexing questions in the HTTYD universe.

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Friday was bath day in Berk, as it was in most Viking villages. The Vikings were unlike most medieval cultures in that they believed in cleanliness, and washed often. When the bath houses had hot water, it was pleasant. If hot water wasn't available, it was more of a toughening-up exercise, especially among the men. That was the case this Friday afternoon.

Snotlout, Tuffnut, Fishlegs, and Hiccup were going through their usual scrubbings in the bath house, trying to get through it as quickly as possible. Someone had forgotten to provide enough firewood to keep the bath water heated (_we won't mention any names, will we, Tuff?_), and once the adults had taken their turn, there wasn't much heat left for the teens. None of them would admit their discomfort in front of the others, of course. Instead, they resorted to displays of bravado, as teenage boys have always done and always will do. Tuff and Lout had a distinct advantage in the bravado department.

"Aww, this is nothin', " Tuffnut was bragging. "I once took a bath in

a stream that was flowing right off a glacier. Top that!"

"Ha!" laughed Snotlout. "I once took a bath by sitting on a glacier until my body heat melted enough water to bathe in!"

"Is that even possible?" Fishlegs looked thoughtful.

"Are you questioning me?" Lout demanded.

"Oh, no, no, it was just a... a scientific inquiry, that's all."

"Good. Don't ever question me," Lout growled. "Hey, Hiccup, aren't you done yet? Shake a leg, will ya?"

"That's the problem. It doesn't shake," Hiccup answered from the bath at the end of the row. "I have to take it off before I wash, so you guys get a head start. If you're done, go ahead; I'll catch up with you later."

Snotlout threw up his hands. "If I ever lost a leg, I would just... rip a leg off the dragon that bit me, and use his leg instead! None of this artificial stuff." He, Tuff, and Legs dried themselves and got dressed. They were leaving when they heard a metallic clatter and the sounds of a fight inside.

"What in the world..." Tuffnut wondered.

"I'll handle this," Snotlout announced. He rushed back into the dimly lit bath house. There, he found Hiccup holding tightly onto someone's foot. The someone was trying desperately to get away, knocking things over and screaming incoherently.

"Yeah! A fight!" Snotlout leaped into the middle of it without asking questions. In moments, he had it all sorted out. Hiccup had been thrown right out of his bath, and Snotlout was holding a small person up by the ankles.

The "person" was about the size of a three-year-old child. It had wrinkled yellow skin, long tangled black hair, and wore only a loincloth. Its speech sounded like three Terrible Terrors fighting over a fish, and it was flailing and fighting like crazy to get away from Snotlout.

Lout didn't like things he didn't understand. He didn't like this thing that he was holding up. But he had a feeling he'd be better off holding it than releasing it. It looked like it might bite him if it got free. "What is this thing?" he asked.

Hiccup stared at it. "I don't believe it! I've hunted these things for years, and you just walk in and grab one!"

"One what?"

"It's a troll!" Hiccup exclaimed. "Don't let him get away!"

"I've got no problem with that!" Lout answered. He held the thing at arm's length and took it out of the bath house as Hiccup dried off, remounted his leg, and got dressed.

"Ewww! That thing is ug-ly!" was Tuffnut's comment.

"Is it really a troll?" Fishlegs marveled. "I thought they didn't exist. Nobody's ever seen one up close."

Snotlout had been having his doubts about his catch, but now he realized he'd found something rare and valuable. The troll was still wriggling, yowling, and trying to escape; Lout decided it wasn't going anywhere until he'd gotten some advantage out of the situation.

Tuffnut was offering suggestions as Hiccup joined them. "Maybe we should kill it. No, let's hurt it, and then kill it. Or maybe we should kill it first and then hurt it."

"I say you take it to Gobber," Hiccup decided.

"Why him?" Snotlout wanted to know.

"Gobber has been curious about these things all his life. Nobody has ever caught one before! If you walk into the forge and show him this thing... well, he'll probably give you a year's worth of free weapon sharpenings, at least."

That sounded like the advantage Snotlout was looking for. "To Gobber, then!" He led the four-teen parade from the bath houses to the forge.

Gobber was hammering some iron into a curve, to make a sickle out of it. When he saw the troll, his next hammer blow missed the work and flattened his two-pronged prosthetic. He didn't even notice what he'd done.

"Is that a troll ye've got there?"

"I think that's what it is," Hiccup said. "I found it going through my clothes in the bath house, and Snotlout caught it. Look at its feet, Gobber! The mystery is solved!"

The troll was tiny compared to an adult human, but its feet were adult-human-sized.

And both its feet were left feet.

Gobber stared, slapped his bare head, and began to laugh. "Oh, ho ho ho, that explains it, all right! Well done, Snotlout! Thank ye for bringin' him in here! That's worth a year's free sharpenin' of yer weapons, fer sure!" Hiccup nodded at him.

"But what are ye gonna do with 'im now?" the smith wanted to know.

"We're gonna kill it, and then hurt it, and then really kill it!" Tuff answered.

"You probably ought to let it go," Hiccup suggested.

"Where's the fun in that?" Snotlout demanded. "I caught it, so I decide what to do with it!"

"How'd you catch it in the first place?" Gobber wondered. "Hiccup, ye said he caught it in the bath house?"

"Yeah, he was going through my clothes. I think I confused him, and that slowed him down."

Gobber grinned and nodded. Fishlegs pondered for a moment, then exclaimed, "Oh, I get it!" The other two just stared at them.

"Okay, guys, here's a hint," Hiccup said. "Trolls only steal the left sock out of a pair."

Snotlout and Tuffnut made their thinking-hard faces. Suddenly, Lout looked up. "The left sock? But you don't... hey, I get it!" He slapped himself in the forehead.

Unfortunately, in order to slap himself in the forehead, he had to let go of one of the troll's legs. The troll kicked him in the chin with its free leg, Snotlout dropped him, and the most elusive creature in Berk scampered away and disappeared.

Snotlout rubbed his chin and watched it go. "If I tell people I caught one, will you guys back me up?"

"I will, but I don't think they'd believe me," Hiccup said. "Me and trolls, we already have a bad reputation."

"It might be good to keep this one to yerself," Gobber suggested.

"It was kind of neat while it lasted," Fishlegs offered.

Tuffnut was still deep in thought. "Wait, trolls only steal the left sock. That means they don't steal the right one. But if they don't steal the right one, that means they steal the wrong one. How do they know which sock is the wrong one?"

THE END

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